

INTERVIEW:

with Liem Tuai

AFA: Why did you want to be a City Councilman?

TUAI: Well, you must remember, originally I was appointed. I suppose there are a number of reasons why I wanted to be a City Councilman. One, I thought it was a challenge, secondly, because it was something different, I'd never done anything like this before. I've been involved in community affairs before this. I thought this was an opportunity to get more deeply involved, and be where the action really is, to help make decisions, and perhaps try to influence the city in the direction it was going.

AFA: What was your platform?

TUAI: Really not a great deal. Again, I was appointed so I didn't have a platform. I ran for re-election in November of 1969. My basic platform was basically, I could do the best job. I could exercise my best judgement and try to keep the city on an even keel.

AFA: Do you feel the Asian community supports you?

TUAI: Oh, I suppose and you'd have to qualify that. Well, I would have to qualify that, any statement I make. I feel my generation and probably the older generation basically support me. And whether or not the young Asians, and I'm talking about the 18 to 25 year olds, perhaps support me, again I know there's a group that doesn't. Is that a majority or a minority I don't know. And so I'd have to qualify it by saying it that way.



Photo by Ken Wong

"I feel my generation and probably the older generation basically supports me."

AFA: What is your concept of an Asian-American?

TUAI: I'm really not sure what the question is. I suppose I'd have to define the question before I could answer it.

AFA: What is an Asian-American?

TUAI: I don't really know, because I'd have to define it before I could answer it. An Asian-American, I don't know what that is. I don't consider myself a hyphenated individual. I consider myself an American first. I think what you're driving at is a person, in my definition, who is an American of Asian or Oriental ancestry, whether it be Chinese, Japanese, Filipino or what else. That would be my definition. I consider myself an American first and of Asian ancestry.

AFA: Do you believe in the Domed stadium?

TUAI: Yes, I believe in the Domed stadium.

AFA: At the King Street Station site?

TUAI: Initially, no. I wanted it at the Seattle Center complex. That's the best place for it. It wouldn't have caused the problems of the King Street site. Getting down to the King Street site; I'm committed first to a stadium second to the citizen process of making a determination to where that stadium was.

(Editor's Note: The citizen population had no say where the stadium would be located.)

The City Council had no decision where the site was, it was a county decision. The question becomes whether or not I support a stadium that it (the county) sited, and I do.

AFA: As president of the City Council, are you going to pass legislation zoning codes to save Chinatown?

TUAI: Yes, depending on what you're saying by saving Chinatown, because I think there are a lot of areas down there that should be rehabilitated. And, in fact, some of it rebuilt. This is not to say we shouldn't have low-cost housing in the area. I fought for a low-cost turnkey project down there, which I thought is better than is being built now.

AFA: Do you support housing for the elderly in the International District?

TUAI: Well I've said yes. In fact, I'd like to see another turnkey project.



Photo by Ken Wong

"An Asian-American, I don't know what that is."

AFA: What is the turnkey project?

TUAI: Oh yes, that's the low-cost housing on Sixth and Main.

AFA: There have been accusations in the Asian community that you're an Uncle Tom. Would you care to respond to this?

TUAI: Oh, it depends on what you mean by an Uncle Tom. If you mean I'm an American of Asian ancestry; if that's your definition, sure. But you're saying I'm an Uncle Tom. In the sense that I'll do whatever the white man tells me, I'll say no. I do what my conscience dictates. You must remember that the people who are saying that about me, and I disagree on things. Does that mean I'm wrong and they're right? I don't claim to be infallible. If they do, that's their prerogative.

AFA: Do you intend to run for mayor in the future?

TUAI: I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

Anthony Corpus

ASIAN ACTION GROUP

Asian Student Coalition (Cleveland)

During the spring of 1972, a group of about eight Asian-American students at Cleveland High School got tired of playing the role of the quiet, docile, uncomplaining Asians. We woke up to the fact that by being quiet and docile, our needs and problems as Asian and Asian-American students would be avoided and never dealt with. Being quiet and docile may get us a good mark and a pat on the back, but we began to see the harmful aspect of this stereotype. This aspect perpetrates disrespect. When people know we will remain passive and uncomplaining, even though we have much to lose, they will take advantage of us. If we wanted a little respect, we had to rid ourselves of our subservient attitude and be willing to struggle for what we believe is right.

Unenlightened Society

We began to voice our concern to the community and Cleveland's administration. Our concerns as Asian-Americans were history books and classes which include Asian-American history. We feel it is important for all people to become aware of the struggles and the hardships which faced Asians during the history of our country. It is important to eliminate the ignorance which exists in our unenlightened society.

We also feel it is important to air Asian and Asian-American staff members and administrators. About 33% of the 940 student population is Asian. Asian students constitute the largest group of people of color at Cleveland.

From its meager beginning of eight students, in the spring of 1972, our Asian Student Coalition has grown and presently has 45 active members. We function as a unified Asian Student Coalition for strength, but there is also a Chinese Club, Filipino Club, and a Japanese Club to help each person learn about his own ethnic group. We find it is easier to come together to learn about each other as Chinese, Filipino, and Japanese-Americans and foreign born Asians, once we have obtained some knowledge and background about ourselves.

International District

Our group addresses itself to social, political and education needs. We also attempt to promote unity, identity, and

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